

## **Finance Board Meeting Minutes: November 24, 2014**

**Attendees:** *Stephen Dapkiewicz, George McCormack, Rachel Meredith-Warren, Ben Caggiano, Patricia Walsh, Devon Manchester, Russ Wilson*

Mr. Dapkiewicz called the meeting to order at approximately 7:36 PM.

First on the agenda, Mr. Dapkiewicz asked if there were any meeting minutes to be approved. Mr. McCormack said that the minutes from October 21 and October 27, 2014 were available. Mr. Manchester made a motion to accept the minutes of October 21. Mr. McCormack seconded the motion. Five members of the board Voted favorably. Two members abstained. Ms. Meredith-Warren requested a correction to the minutes of October 27<sup>th</sup>. Her objection to the town budget motion presented to the Board on the 27th was that in receiving the motion approximately 15 minutes before the start of town meeting, the Finance Board did not have adequate time to review and make any recommendations. Ms. Meredith-Warren made a motion to accept the minutes pending that correction. Mr. Manchester seconded the motion. Six members of the board voted favorably and one member abstained.

The second item on the agenda regarding electronic voting. Mr. McCormack experienced some A/V difficulties and the Board moved onto the third item on the agenda.

The third item on the agenda was a Budgeting Workshop. Ms. Meredith-Warren explained that the state association of finance boards has an annual meeting at which various training workshops are presented and she has been investigating the feasibility of bringing one of these workshops before our board. Mr. Dapkiewicz expressed support for bringing one of these workshops, known as Budgeting 101, to the Finance Board in Stoneham. Budgeting 101 is the workshop taught by the town manager of the town of Northborough. For several years Northborough has been awarded a national award for budgeting best practices. Their town manager teaches this workshop around the state approximately 8 times each year. Various board members began to discuss the budgeting process as it stands in Stoneham. Mr. Wilson expressed concerns that the allocations requested by various departments reflect department heads' perceptions of what is possible within the confines of the budget and political landscape rather than what each department actually needs to function appropriately. Mr. Wilson expressed concern about the influence of the Town Administrator and Selectmen on the current budgeting process in Stoneham. Ms. Meredith-Warren stated that she does not feel that the Board has a clear understanding of exactly how the budgeting process does work in Stoneham at this time. Mr. Dapkiewicz stated that he's planning to bring the town administrator into one of our upcoming meetings to outline the budgeting process. There was discussion within the board about whether it makes sense to bring in the town administrator early in the annual budgeting process or later, as has been customary. The board expressed support for conducting the Budgeting 101 workshop as soon as possible. No vote was requested or taken on this matter.

Mr. McCormack was able to swap computers and resolve his audiovisual problems (to some extent).

Mr. McCormack then delivered a presentation on the feasibility of bringing an Electronic Voting system to our town meeting. As background, he described the chaotic voting process that happened at the fall special town meeting when voting on motions for the Bikeway/Greenway took over an hour to conduct and left residents lacking confidence in the accuracy of the final tallies. By conducting interviews and some initial financial analysis, Mr. McCormack has estimated that conducting accurate and expeditious voting at town meetings may cost between \$5-\$10,000 per meeting, assuming that the town leases voting equipment from the most common supplier in the Commonwealth. Early analysis suggests that leasing equipment will be the most financially prudent for the town. The selectmen have formed a committee to investigate the matter further and Mr. McCormack is representing the Finance Board on that committee. He showed a video of voting in the town of Weston, in which approximately 600 town meeting attendees were able to vote on a contentious issue in under five minutes. No vote was requested or taken in this matter.

Item number four on the agenda was the Fiscal Year 16 Budget Process. The bulk of the Board's discussion on that item actually occurred when discussing agenda item 3, the Budgeting Workshop.

Item number five on the agenda was Department Review Assignments. The board discussed the different departments for which we would like to conduct reviews in preparation for the FY16 budget cycle. Generally, two board members were assigned to each department. Mr. Dapkiewicz planned to review the department assignments and make modifications or adjustments as needed and ask for feedback from absent members on the assignment list. In regard to timing, Mr. Dapkiewicz suggested that it would be acceptable to start department reviews in January, but that board members who wish to begin earlier than that were allowed to do so. Ms. Meredith-Warren asked about a deadline for departmental reviews. Mr. Dapkiewicz said that he would determine a date.

Item number six on the agenda concerned Other Business.

Mr. McCormack reviewed the Fiscal Year 2015 Classification Hearing report of the Stoneham Board of Assessors. The mil rate for Stoneham will be going down and assessments for the town will be going up, resulting in an average increase of approximate one hundred dollars per single family home. The exceptions to this are the Colonial Park neighborhood and neighborhoods along the Wakefield border where assessments will be substantially higher due to recent home sales being higher in those areas. He also noted that commercial tax collections in Stoneham are quite low, with about 10% of the collections coming from commercial uses. He contrasted that with the town of Burlington which generates 60% of its tax revenues from commercial uses. Stoneham will also be realizing approximately \$400,000 of new tax revenues from new development which is a significant change over recent years. This \$400,000 dollars is unrelated to the Fallon Road development for the proposed Weiss Farm development.

Ms. Meredith-Warren provided an update that the action plan for Stoneham Town Center will be complete in December. After completion, a website will be launched and the report will be presented to key boards. She also noted that the Stoneham High School has been recognized in

Newsweek magazine for the college readiness of its seniors. The high school is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> second in the state and 338 in the country.

Mr. Manchester made a motion to adjourn Mr. McCormack seconded the motion. The board voted unanimously to adjourn.